

WINROCK INTERNATIONAL

SPEECH BY JAMES WOLFENSOHN, PRESIDENT
THE WORLD BANK GROUP
AT INAUGURATION OF SOLAR VILLAGE

VILLAGE POWER 2000

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S P E E C H

MR. WOLFENSOHN: I thought I might just speak before you all leave the room, so we're barring the doors so that you have to listen to me for three minutes.

But let me say first of all--by the way, I'm Jim Wolfensohn, and I work here.

[Laughter and applause.]

MR. WOLFENSOHN: The first thing I want to say is that I'm really delighted that this conference is taking place at all, and I'm particularly delighted that it's being held here at the Bank. I've seen the list of all the people that are here, and collectively you have a huge amount of development experience, and I am very grateful that you're here, that we've been able to do this with UNDP, USAID, the National Renewable Energy Laboratory and Winrock International, and I want to express my thanks to them, as I do to all the speakers.

I've been given, as you might expect, copious notes on the speech that I'm sure you don't want me to deliver for 45 minutes.

[Laughter.]

MR. WOLFENSOHN: So I'll cut it down to 30.

[Laughter.]

MR. WOLFENSOHN: But let me speak, rather than from the notes, from my heart about this. I saw on the weekend the putting up of the village outside for renewable energy, for solar photovoltaic, power for wind, and I was reminded of many villages that I've been in around the world, where I've seen clean energy at work. And you will see outside some applications of clean energy.

I was asked why they didn't construct a whole village. One of the reasons was cost. The other was time. And so if you walk around the house, you'll see everything done on different sides of the house, and I want to congratulate the people who put it together, because it seems to me to reflect in many ways the work that all of you know about and that we are engaged in.

For me the fundamental issue, which I guess it is for all of you, is that we've got two billion people in the world that don't have any power, that don't have any light, that don't have sources of energy for either irrigation, or for medical purposes, or for light, or for communications, and we're beginning really a revolution in terms of the technology and its cost and its applicability. And it's

very clear that your objective of getting to 30 countries and 300 million people by the year 2010 is achievable, and surely we at the Bank are very anxious to be part of that.

But it's going to be something, which, along with all of the things that we're doing today, needs to be included in a broader agenda for development, an agenda which really scares me because of the size. We have today, as I guess you know, 6 billion people on the planet. We have 4.8 billion of them living in developing countries. And in the next 25 years, we'll add another 2 billion people to the planet, of whom more than--just about all but 50 million will go to developing countries, so near as--in another 25 years we'll have 6.8 billion people out of a planet of 8 billion, living in worlds of development. So that our challenge and our focus today of 2 billion is a target that will keep increasing.

And what we have to do is to find ways in which we can not only get model villages and model examples of how you can use renewable energy, but how you can scale it up and do it quickly and effectively and economically.

And it's very clear to me that this is a task way beyond the World Bank. It's a task in which we really need

to join all of us together, first the countries, and make sure that they understand the need and the importance of this type of energy source for its economic, and for its environmental and for its social purposes.

But it goes beyond that, because we need everyone that is here, people from other multilateral agencies, from bilateral agencies, to join together in programs where we don't have our flags all over everything, but where we in fact come together in programmatic support of programs that are manifestly desirable, and where there's not going to be a little plaque everywhere saying, "This was put up by the World Bank" or somebody, but which in fact is really part of a much broader and more anonymous program.

The second thing is, once we all get together, is that it's very clear that we need two other actors to work with us and with the governments, and we have representatives here, of course, from civil society in its various forms, because the training, the education, the distribution, the servicing, even the convincing, has to be done very often by colleagues in the civil society. Nongovernmental organizations already play a very major role

in terms of renewable energy, and it has to be a partnership role.

And finally, it's the private sector. We need extensive private sector support, not only in the development of implements that are going to be used at the right cost, and that in itself is a highly significant thing, but also in the servicing, in terms of the distribution, in terms of making sure that the whole system works.

Frankly, it needs all of us. And so the notion that you should meet again every couple of years to review this is something that certainly we at the Bank wholeheartedly support. And we're very happy either to host it, or be hosted, to participate, to lead, to follow, to do whatever is necessary to be a good member of this family, because for us, this call to action, which there is basically in this meeting, is really very, very important.

I have a bunch of colleagues here who are really committed, as you can see, to the whole question of renewable energy. It means a lot for us. It's something that we propose to highlight in our country assistance strategies, in trying to sell governments on the importance

of renewable energy, in trying to see how we can link up networks, how we can gain experience, and how, essentially, we can work on this within the context, not just of renewable energy, but of advancing technology generally.

We happen to believe that in terms of information technology and the use of communications technology, that there are a couple of elements that can be helped by this. Obviously, you need an energy source to access the communications revolution, and I've seen it in various countries powered by wind and powered by solar, satellites, and even powered by wind-up radios, as I guess all of us have seen. But the impact of this is that it opens up a whole range of possibilities in terms of information and knowledge that can allow us to link this community together to better use the technology which has been developed, and also to, in its own way, encourage people to use this form of technology, and to give the servicing assistance and to give the support that people need in terms of information and knowledge.

So we are at the beginning of a revolution. What is important to me is not that we have a village here and a village there, and an example here and an example there.

What you're seeing outside is not what we mean. We can, all of us, put up a Potemkin village with lights and with water being taken out of the ground, and with freezing for medical purposes and all the things that you can do. What I think we need to be committed to is scaling up on an economic basis the use of renewable energy, and we need to drive the price down, and work together to try to see how we can spread it out, because 2 billion people today will be 4 billion people tomorrow, and we're really got to get on with it to try and see how we can not only meet the current challenge, but stay ahead of the curve.

And I simply want to say to you that we know that we can only do it partnership. We know we've got a lot to learn. We have some experience which we are prepared to contribute. But we very much look forward to the partnership with all of you.

So thank you for being here. As you can see, my colleagues have such confidence in me, that they've put me on 6:30 at night in the hope that I won't embarrass them.

[Laughter.]

MR WOLFENSOHN: And so I appreciate very much that you stayed. Normally they bring me in and there's an empty

hall, so I appreciate it--I appreciate very much that you're here, and I hope you'll enjoy seeing the one-house village outside with the booths that I think are there. And I hope you enjoy the rest of your conference. Thank you very much.

[Applause.]

[End of speech.]

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